

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Appropriations Committee
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) budget
February 18, 2014**

**IN SUPPORT OF and COMMENTS regarding
H.B. No. 5030 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR
ENDING JUNE 30, 2015.**

Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups across the state, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals living with mental health challenges and parents and family members of individuals living with such challenges. I am here tonight to support proposals that enhance access to services and make recommendations to increase access in additional areas in the budget.

We applaud and strongly support the Governor's proposal to **add 110 units of Supportive Housing**, including \$1.1 million for supportive services for scattered-site Supportive Housing and \$1.1 million for Rental Assistance Program (RAP) vouchers for individuals living with mental health challenges (located in the Department of Housing, DOH, budget). Supportive Housing is a proven, effective and cost-effective means of giving families and individuals with mental health challenges, the opportunity to live in the community by addressing their basic human needs for adequate and affordable housing and giving them the option of ongoing supports and services.

We support the proposed **increased funding for transitional and residential services, including for young adults**. The need for a full and adequately funded array of services, particularly community services, in the mental health system is still a work in progress. The more people are supported with relevant services early on, the better their chances are to lead full lives, as they should be able to, and the less cost is incurred later on in high-end, high-cost settings such as emergency rooms or hospitals.

We support the Governor's proposal to dedicate funding to an **anti-stigma campaign** and hope that this awareness raising and action campaign will include and take advantage of the already strong mental health advocacy community that exists and utilize its numerous resources of networks and diverse expertise.

We also recommend to **expand funding for Young Adult Services (YAS)** to include young adults that are experiencing their first mental health break. Currently, DMHAS' Young Adult Services are only accessible to youth who have been involved in the Department of Children and Families (DCF) system and are transitioning into the DMHAS system. Of the approximately 18,000 young adults in the system, only about 1,100 are currently able to be served through Young Adult Services. With YAS' focus on early intervention, engagement, transition, services and recovery, this trauma-sensitive and person-centered approach has been very effective at supporting young adults to learn the skills and develop the support systems that lead to full, successful lives. This opportunity should be available to more, and one could argue **all, young adults**, regardless of when they enter the system.

We thank the Governor and the legislature for building on the investments made in mental health in the 2013 legislative session; investments that benefit the entire state. We appreciate your support and farsightedness. Increased funding for Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, Peer Bridger services, and Supportive Housing were appreciated and necessary steps to investing into a robust community service system. At the same time, we are also aware of the **importance of continuing to build on these investments and the gains made** in order to move forward for the benefit of our state and its residents' health and well-being.

Thank you and please let us know if we can answer any questions for you.
Genuinely, Daniela Giordano